Center for Modern Greek Studies
Greek American Oral History Project
Transcription

Tape:

Subject: Christina Kolias
Interviewer: Georgia Kolias
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Counter: 000

G: This is Georgia Kolias. <"The date is May 8, 2007. I'm interviewing Christina Dervos Kolias" this part was cut off in copy? {003}> for the Oral History Project at San Francisco State University's Modern Greek Studies department. Can you please tell me your name?

Kolias: My name is Christina Kolias, and, uh, my father's name is Yiorgos Dervos.

G: And when were you born?

Kolias: Born on July 18, 1942 in, Kato Kertezaiika, Pergolias <Ileias?> {005}.

G: Kertezaiika, Pergolias, in Greece?

Kolias: In Greece, // 1942.

G: // 1942. Does Kertezaiika mean anything?

Kolias: Okay, my father came from <unintelligible, sounds like "Arab" {006}>. My father came a village, originally it was from Russia. It was two brothers, they came to Greece and they established in that little town, and they, make their name, the, Kertezaiika, Kertiza, because it was all, brothers, two brothers, cousins and nephews and all of that, and it become a big town, and after that, they move down to Pirgos and still they, they down the little town all we were living after we were, uh, small kids. They call it a Kertezaiika, that's when they took some of the big town to the little town, and that's how everything went.

G: And is, so is Dervos the original family name?

Kolias: Yes.

G: Yes. <Kolias makes a sound of agreement>. So were they Greek people from Russia or were they Russian?

Kolias: No, Greek people from Russia that came two hundred years back from Russia, actually, it was from Georgia and they came to that little town, and that's where the two brothers established themselves, and, you know, after generations and generations, that town become it was only relatives, no outsider.

G: Hmm. Do you know what, you said that was two hundred years ago? Do you know kind of—what year it was?

Kolias: No.

G: Okay.

Kolias: I do not have idea.

G: Okay. And why did you come, so did, you grew up in Kertezaiika?

Kolias: My <unintelligible, sounds like "telpa" {020}> I was about seven years old when I remember myself, we came to Kertezaiika, yes. Our family of, family of nine people and two the parents, eleven, and my grandmother, my mom's mom, she was living most of the time with us, and we were happy little kids, running around, nine kids. Can you imagine?

G: <chuckles> What was the house like where you lived? Was it a farm, or?

Kolias: It's one, when we came down to the small Kertezaiika, they, my father, he had a lot of sheeps and a lot of animals, and he built a little farm house with a *fterines και αλλα* <"and other"{026}>, just like grass, different kind of grass and we live in that one, and then after a couple of years, he cut, he cut a big mud and then he put some, from *τη σιτάρι, το—τα έβαλα μέσα σε—το σιτάρι, τα άχυρα* <"the wheat, he put them in a wheat, haystack"{030}> and he fix those blocks of, just like blocks of mud and that *άχυρα*, and we built a house.

G: Oh.

Kolias: And after that house, it was there for, oh, it was, we were going to school, we were about ten-years-old, about four or five years in that one, and after that my father moved a little bit farther up to the same, uh, <unintelligible, "host"? {035}> farm house, and he fix a bigger house, a better house with my mom and all of us. We were helping all, you can see us inside that mud, cutting those, those, square, um //

G: Like bricks.

Kolias: Bricks. And you had to leave them and to dry out, very hot, they become very hot and then you build a house.

G: Ahh. That's amazing.

Kolias: Yeah, it was lotta fun, but it was lotta work, too.

G: How many rooms were in the house?

Kolias: They had, we had a big living room, and we had two bedrooms and a kitchen.

G: For eleven people?

Kolias: Eleven people, yeah. <Interviewer chuckles> But we were sleeping all together, we had fun together, and eating all together. <Interviewer makes an agreeable sound> Happy little family.

G: Yeah. So, you had how many brothers and how many sisters?

Kolias: I had five brothers and four sisters. So, and a one sister, we were five sisters and five brothers, one sister, she died, the night I was born, of a yellow fever. So, and then I born, and they put her name give it to me, to become my name. But, for the next seventeen years I was, my name it was Beba. <Interviewer giggles>. And nobody in the world knew me, Christina. So until I got married and I came to this country.

G: So, did you stay in that house until you were seventeen?

Kolias: I stay, we stay all in that house, in the meantime, in the days, my father build another house, bigger than that, and then the second house, my youngest brother born there, his name is Christo, and we are so excited, you know, to see that my mom's had a baby. <Interviewer agrees>. So then my father, then we built another house, bigger than that, but still we were a lot of kids and some of the oldest ones, just like my older brother, Angelos, he went to Athens, and my sister, older sister, Vasso, she got married. And, little by little, the family got smaller and smaller because everybody was leaving. <Interviewer agrees>. So, that's about it.

G: So when did you leave?

Kolias: Well, one day, when I was nine-years-old, my mom, she, her sister asked, because her sister, she had no kids, she asked for my mother and my father if I was going to stay with them. I was asked I wanna stay with them for a year. But, I didn't like the way that they were treating me and I left, and I went back to my father and mother and then they, stay, I went to school and when I was thirteen years old, they, this aunt, she want to take me again. When, well, my mom, she said "I agree to it," and then when, I stay with her for a one year and she was mistreating me again and my second brother, George, I call him and I said to him, this is what's happening and he came and take me home to where he was living with my older brother. I stay there until he went to the army, and then my older brother, he could not afford the rent, and he sent me back to the village.

G: So how long did you stay there with them?

Kolias: Oh I stay there for, at least, it was three-and-a-half-years.

G: Ah, so by that time you were almost seventeen?

Kolias: Yeah.

G: Okay.

Kolias: So, when I went to the village, after four months I was there, one morning here comes, the husband-to-be with my first cousin, and his brother //

G: What year was that?

Kolias: 1960.

G: 1960.

Kolias: That was, that was, August 15. No, September 15. So, they came there and they saw me, and they, they like me, so whatever. And//

G: //So, it was your brother, your cousin and the groom.

Kolias: Yeah.

G: Your future husband.

Kolias: Yes.

G: Yeah.

Kolias: And they saw me, and they left and they came back the second week with my brother with the groom's brother and the wife. And, I don't know what they did talk with my father, my mother, but after that, a week later they came, and they just married me, that was Thursday afternoon, on September 29, and after our, ten days after that, he left, and he came to, after the wedding, after ten days, he came, he left and came to the United States so he send me the papers. So, to invite me to come to United States to live with him.

G: So how many times did you meet him before you married him?

Kolias: Just, whatever I'm telling you about//

G: Twice.

Kolias: Twice. And that the day, that I marry him. So, nobody ask me if I like him or didn-don't like him, or if I want to marry him or not, just in those years they were very rough times, and lotta, lotta kids. And my thoughts was, oh, well he is twenty years older than myself. But I said to myself, if I sacrifice my life for my brothers and sisters and help my father and mother, I will do it. I say that to myself, but nobody else. So, the only thing I ask him, before the wedding, I said to him, if I don't like it where, in the United States, can we come back in five years? And he swear to me that's what will happen. Of course, that's not happening, and I said to him, if I'm gonna be American citizen, in three years, like you telling me, I, can I bring one brother so I can have, you know, somebody? And he promised that, so when I came here and, three years I got my citizenship and I ask him if he, if it's okay to bring the brother or sister, and he tell me not to ever, ever repeat that word. And I said, well, to this days, I don't have relatives in this country. So.

G: Did you know that you were going to be married on the day that you, that the wedding happened?

Kolias: They, they came in the morning, five o'clock in the morning, they tell me eleven o'clock, I'm going be getting married.

G: Oh my goodness.

Kolias: And that's, that's how.

G: Where did you get married?

Kolias: <Takes deep breath> I got married, in my house, the house that we were living in. And my older sister, she had, she was getting ready to get married Sunday, and I did ask, as long as one of my sisters getting married Sunday, why don't we make, a double wedding, so, you know, nobody's gonna. But, my husband-to-be, he didn't want not even to hear it because he said that, that he had to come back to the United States.

G: And this was Thursday and she was getting married Sunday <both interviewer and Kolias say Sunday simultaneously>, so like three or four days later.

Kolias: Three days later.

G: Yeah.

Kolias: Well, anyway, things//

G: So did the priest come to your house to do the wedding?

Kolias: Yes. The priest there, it was a regular priest from a small village. He came to the house, he done the ceremony, and, at the end they had just coffee and tea, and lotta people they came from Athens. They were uh—They came about forty people from Athens, all my relatives, my mother's side and no, only my fa-mother's side, and after that, we left and we went to a big town, Patra, and we had, some, on the way, we had some luncheon, because by then it was 12:30, 1:00. And then, we stay in Patra, and the people that we were with, they went back to their homes, in Athens. They had, rent a big Pullman, that's, a tourist bus.

G: Uh-hmm. So how did they know to come? Were they already going to come <Kolias talks over interviewer, but is difficult to understand> for your sister's wedding, or, did somebody tell them? //

Kolias: No, no. Apparently they, because they had in Athens, they have telephones and they kept communicating with each other, <interviewer makes an active listening sound> they, they had called them, but it seems, those people, they were, first, we're talking about first cousins and second cousins and nephew, it was, I mean, it's a huge family.

G: So they heard, basically that morning, and they came down on a bus?

Kolias: Apparently, they, they told them night before.

G: Oh, they told the cousins before they told you?

Kolias: Yeah, yeah. That, when they came down, when they get ask, we did not have a telephone <interviewer makes an active listening sound> to call us or anything. So, and they did not, felt, it was important enough, or whatever you can say <interviewer makes an active listening sound>, that to give me a wedding for a couple of days or anything, so whatever {143}.

G: So you were seventeen, you had turned seventeen //

Kolias: I was 17 un-until July 18, and I got married on September 29, of the same year.

G: And how old was your husband? At that time?

Kolias: At the time he was 38, at least that's what he said. So, but you know, the age have nothing to do with a lot of things. Other people get married to with older people, and they have a beautiful wedding, a lot of, you know, exciting life. It's their personalities. Some people, they're not secure enough to be happy with each other or be, you know, trust in the other person. So, that's what it is.

G: What did you wear on your wedding day?

Kolias: Oh they brought me, they brought me a wedding gown that they selected and they rented for, just for that day.

G: Who brought it?

Kolias: My first cousin, Eleni.

G: Um-hmm. And who did they rent it from?

Kolias: From a bridal shop in Athens.

G: Did they bring a photographer, too?

Kolias: They—yes, they had a photographer. Yes, it was a relative who were taking some pictures there, yeah.

G: So when, after, so the priest married you in the house. You wore a rented wedding dress. There was a photographer that was a relative, and then afterwards you guys went to Patra and had some beverages <Kolias agrees>, or whatever, like a reception. Then did you stay in Patra, or did you go //

Kolias: // I stay there for four days, and I was begging my husband then to take me back to my sister's wedding, and he told me, right then, that not to ask any, any privileges because I belong to him and I'm his wife and he's gonna tell me exactly what to do and not to do. So, he didn't want to hear that he wanted me to go, and, to see, you know, my sister getting married, or, I went back to the village only couple of times to see my mother, because I stay there from September, to the ninth of January. My brothers, they came, couple days after Christmas, and then, I ask him if I can stay the holidays and he told me no, I have to be, having to be in the United States by the first of the year.

G: So where were you staying //

Kolias: 1961.

G: So he left, he left, okay, after you were married, he left you in Greece.

Kolias: With his brother //

G: // Oh, with his brother.

Kolias: Brother's home, and he did not want me to go to my mom, my mom or my brothers or anything, he wanted to know exactly every move I was doing, and then, I went to his village for couple weeks, and his, his mother, she was one of the most beautiful, beautiful people I ever met. She was, say, the most special person. So, I stay with them for two weeks and then I went back to Athens and I went to go to the village to stay with my mom, because my mom, she didn't want me to leave. So, it

was pretty hard. Anyway, and then I came to, it was time for me to come to Athens, so my mother-in-law, she came to Athens and she wanted to go, to come to the airport when I was ready to leave. And nobody wants to pick her up to the second floor of the, you know, where they see you go in.

G: Why?

Kolias: Because they wanted, they were in a hurry to, her son was in a hurry, he was in a hurry to go home. And she said, "no, if I don't see my, my daughter-in-law to leave, I won't leave from this place" and my brother Angelo, take her on his hands and took her upstairs, because she was cripple from one leg, and she was very skinny, very tall, but very skinny, and they stay, my brother and her, they stay there until I left. And then he took her home to her, to, to her son's house. So I never—then that she was a very, very special woman.

G: So, um, so what was the date when you left Greece?

Kolias: I left Greece, it was, January 1st, 1961.

G: 1961. What airline did you travel on?

Kolias: Was TWA then.

G: And how long did it take you to get, what was your route? You traveled from Athens to where?

Kolias: I came from Athens to New York, and then when we got into New York, that was, the airplane to come to San Francisco left already, and took us, from Greece to New York nine hours, and when I, they told us that, I was speaking nothing, not one word of English, but this was this old little man from San Jose and he, when they, he find out that I was not speaking English and I didn't, I was traveling by myself, he volunteered to be, helping me out a little bit. So for the first time in my life I saw a black person, and it was amazing because I seen them in a magazine and I thought they were not existing, so by then I saw them and then when this person took me to the hotel, a Hilton Hotel in

New York, and then, he left me there, and with this little Greek man, and he stay, he stay in New York, because the Greek guy, I don't remember his name, so many years now, um, he stay in New York because he, he wanted to help me, that's how Greek they are.

G: So he, he was supposed to travel somewhere else but he stayed to help you?

Kolias: Yes, he supposed to travel to take his plane, he wanted to catch his plane to go to San Jose, but he did not, he did not left, he stay with me, and then, in the morning when the people from the airport, they came to pick me up, here comes the black man, again, take us in a taxi to the airport and the little man he got there and he gave me his phone number and address and again my husband, he forbid me to call them or anything, so, he did call me once with his wife, but, that was it. So a lot of time I, I regret that, you know, he was such a nice person to help me out.

G: Did, had you ever flown on an airplane before?

Kolias: No. That was my first time.

G: Had you been to the airport before?

Kolias: No.

G: Had you ever seen an airplane?

Kolias: No. <Interviewer chuckles>. Well, I see airplane, you know, because, in, next to, there was a στην Ελλάδα <"in Greece" {232}>, they have an army, army airport.

G: Um-hm.

Kolias: But not for civilian airplanes. So I saw from far away just like we see airplanes in the sky, but no, never close by {244}.

G: Were you scared?

Kolias: Yeah, I was scared, but I was young, I was just like a dumb boy, I was just like nothing scare me because, I-I don't know life, it was, maybe we're not, we were, we were poor, but we're not that poor, but my father, mother they were staying behind us to be strong in life. So I was not scared, but I think that I was not scared that much, because I was feeling I done something for my father, mother, and my brothers. I can help. That was my whole, whole thing, to help them out <crying> and I never did.

G: You never did what?

Kolias: I never helped them, I never got them, any of them in this country, I never help any of them with any money or anything because for sixteen years I did not work here, I did not have money and there were <unintelligible {252}> money, they were in this country. So, anyway, when they came to the airport in San Francisco, my husband and his uncle and five older, older Greek guys, they were there, that was the friends of his uncle {265}. They were waiting for me and they had, his uncle, he had a big, fixing big dinner in the house, and when we got to the house, we had, had big dinner. And I never saw those people ever again. So, yeah it was one young couple, his name it was Costa and his wife, who was from Mexico, and they were very, very young and very supportive and very nice people. But, after that, no communication with any of them. So, it was okay.

G: Do you remember what he made for dinner?

Kolias: The uncle, he had rack of lamb with potatoes. He had a Greek salad. And he, if I remember correctly, he had some kind of ice cream and he fixed himself this American cake. <Interviewer laughing> His uncle, he was extremely nice person and he was very helpful, he taught me how to cook, he taught me, how to be brave, how to be strong. <crying> And he was a good friend. He was more of a good friend, like a father and mother and sister and brother all together, to me. And, after that, I had my first child and he helped me a lot.

G: So you lived in a house in San Francisco with your husband and his uncle?

Kolias: Um-hmm. Yes.

G: Did you, so nobody else lived with you, the three of you?

Kolias: The three of us. And then, my, Soula, Athanasia came, after a year, about 13 months later, after I got here <interviewer makes an active listening sound> I got Soula, so, that was a big, you know, help, because I had somebody <long silence> {300}. Anyway, so, yeah, that's my story about my life. Three years, three and a half years later it was, children came along, and it was happy I had two daughters and I had two kids, so.

G: How would you spend your days?

Kolias: My days, it was, in the morning, his uncle he was teaching me how to cook, and then he, at ten o'clock I suppose, I supposed to be ready and he, the uncle supposed to take me to the barber shop, so I can stay with him in the barber shop, he had a little room on the back. And I was staying there until he was getting off, from the job, my husband, six o'clock. And then, we come home, and the uncle, he have ready the dinner and we have something to eat and then watch a little bit T.V. and that's was the day.

G: So, go ahead, sorry.

Kolias: That went on until, soon as he was, I was pregnant, Athanasia, about eight months and then I stay home and had her, and then, just, watching T.V. and most of the time it was watching T.V. and learning English from that T.V. because I was so determined to learn the language and go and get my citizenship. And then his uncle, he was, he got some books for me and he was teaching me how to learn the questions and answers.

G: For?

Kolias: For my citizenship. So when I had three years March 27, I went and I pass right away.

G: What year?

Kolias: Nine- '60, '63. Yeah, '63. And I got my citizenship, and after that, nothing happened.

G: What, where did you go to get your citizenship?

Kolias: Oh, it was downtown, but I don't remember now the address or anyplace.

G: Was it like a courthouse or?

Kolias: It was//

G: //Immigration?

Kolias: Had to be, but I don't remember. Had to be some kind, it was, I don't if it was the city hall, because it was, I remember that they were three hundred people, all of them, they were getting the interview. They were asking us four questions and four answers and four words to write down, and I, myself, I passed all of them. And you supposed to have, witnesses that somebody knows you for those three years, and you live in that place and you communicated with that person, so, yes, I had, I had one witnesses, that she knew me. And //

G: Was that a friend?

Kolias: That was, that was a lady and her name was Sophie Fitzarella but she's dead now. So, she came, because it wasn't that you have, you have to really, really know that person, it was the people next door, the Italian people, they know me, but we cannot understand each other that much, so, and they were very, very old people.

G: Do you remember what the questions were that they asked you to get your citizenship?

Kolias: At the time they ask me who was the President of the United States? Who makes the, the Congress? And they ask me, it was only twenty minutes, you have to put all that in twenty minutes, and then they ask me to write down "it is, it is cold" and the other one, "it was, it is warm," that was the questions they are, they had put down//

G: Had to write them down, you had to show you could write English?

Kolias: //Yeah, yeah. Well, they knew that I did not know how to write English, but they wanted, those years, they wanted to know if you are willing to do, to this country, to be happy to this country, that you are willing to learn the language and the way of living here. <Interviewer makes an active listening sound> So, I had no problem in that because I had to know the language at least to really to understand it, to understand what's going around me.

G: What did, when you came to San Francisco, would, did it seem like a really big city to you? Was it very unfamiliar? What was it like?

Kolias: Well, You know, to be a big city, I was living in Athens for, almost, fifty-one **END OF SIDE A** {391}.

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G: …two of the interview with Christina Kolias. Do you remember what you were saying? Oh, we were talking about did San Francisco seem like a big city to you?

Kolias: Not really because Athens, it's, a bigger, big city. And, it was very similar, it's very similar with San Francisco. Have lotta hills up and down and all of that. And, the only thing that's worse, the hills, that have more, up and down hills in San Francisco, more than Athens. Otherwise, the most impressive

thing to me, it was more the New York at the airport with the black person and the hotel and not to have anybody to, you know, to give me a hand except, God bless, where he is, he when this Greek guy who, he was very all about this <unintelligible {010}> that time, and he was, he was traveling with his wife, but his wife left before him, and. No, San Francisco it was beautiful as always, but it was for me to, very easy to learn San Francisco back then, took me a lotta years to be around San Francisco, because my husband, he was not one of those people that liked to go out, or go anywhere. Sometimes we would, we would, he was forcing to go to the movie theaters or things like that, so.

G: He was forcing who to go?

Kolias: George and me. Forcing George that, this is your woman you brought here, looks like your own child, and you have to take her out. But my husband, he was, most of the time he was jealous of anybody who was saying "hi" to me or anybody who was looking at me, or he forbid me to go to church, he forbid me to go to any Greek festivals, or dinners, or anything like that. So we didn't went to no, to this days, we don't going nowhere like that. So, yeah. I met some people later on. They, they were all, had older husbands, but they never had, you know, to be so αποκλεισμένος <"excluded"{025}>. Just like that, what, I, with my, my kids, my daughters. So.

G: Were those people Greek?

Kolias: Yes.

G: They were Greek?

Kolias: They were Greek people.

G: Did they also have arranged marriages?

Kolias: Yeah, they had, very close marriage. Yeah. In those years, 1960, before 1970, most of the marriages from Greece, it was arranged marriages. And, most people, they got what they gave

them. In those years, they didn't ask the permission from the daughter, if she wants to get married, if she likes this husband or if she likes that. It was hard times. It was very hard times. And my father and my mother and my mother's mother never want me to leave, but, my father thought, oh, well, here's Thenio's and Eleni's brother. Eleni is my first cousin. They were putting their faith in their, God in their hands, that this, they were giving me, they marry me with the brother and they thought he will be just like the Thenio, my husband's brother. But of course turn out, it wasn't like him. So, okay, so nothing they can do, I mean, nothing they could do. If I had here a brother or a sister, maybe would be easier for me and more than anything else, my kids, and are so, one thing I regret that, not to have somebody here <crying>. But that's life. Life goes on. You cannot change what each of us will be. <crying>.

G: When you got here, did you think that the culture was very different from Greece? Or did you see differences?

Kolias: Well, it took me long, long time to see the whole, you know, world over here, how is it. I saw lot of it on the T.V. because I did watch lotta T.V., and it took me four, five years to see what was the culture here. If you don't go outside your house, you cannot learn it, you cannot see it. So, anyway, then when I was, fifteen years later, we had problems with the old house, and I had to go to work. And of course, I never had money in my hands, I never knew how the money, <unintelligible {054}> money, how they work, or, I had only coins {056}. So //

G: In that fifteen years that you were married, you only had coins?

Kolias: Yes.

G: You were never allowed to have money?

Kolias: No. If I needed something, he will buy it for me. If I need clothes, he will buy it, whatever he thought I needed, a necessity. And if I wanted to go grocery shopping, he will take us for grocery shopping. And of course I learn how to sew and fix the dresses for my daughters and my own clothes so we can

have some extra, because the material was so cheap that, very cheap. And, I <unintelligible {060}> like I said, I was very strong woman, but, I was not strong enough for a man I married, so.

G: What do you mean you weren't strong enough, for the man you married?

Kolias: Because the man—the man I marry, he was saying he got married to a young woman so he can make her the way he wanted to. So, when you are in a country that you don't know the language, you don't know the, nothing, you don't know anybody, you are just like you are in the top of the mountain, who, you don't know how to get down or to get nowhere. So it is, you have to know, I mean, I had a next-door neighbors, they were 90 and 85 year old people. They were, send me flowers from the backyard, and my husband thought that they were giving flowers because they were in love with me. And I had only two weeks in this country. It wasn't anything. This country's beautiful. I have no regrets I came to this country. The only thing, I'm very lonely. <silence>

G: Are you in touch with your relatives in Greece?

Kolias: When I came here <crying>, for nine years, I did not talk to anybody or I had lotta letters, I was writing back and forth, sometimes every week, I was getting lotta letters from my family, and when my mom and then my sister's husband, see he died from illness, and then my, my little brother, the second little brother, he died in accident, and then my mother, she died on top of that, and I had no communication at all because I was forbidden to call them, or spend the money on anybody. So I had no money to spend anyway. So, then, now when I got the job, I got the work, I swear to myself that I'm gonna show my kids, my relatives, so they can know them, they can, you know, see them, where I came from, what's all about, and what's life. So, after that, I start calling to them, I talk to my relatives, of course, most of them, my mother, that's was the most important person in my life. She was gone. And then, now I talk to them all the time. I talk to them all the time, almost, almost every

other day. And they calling me, and I have very good relationship with all of them. They never stop loving me or loving them. <silence>

G: When you started working and you started earning your own money, were you able to do more things?

Kolias: Well, the first four years, he was taking to me, taking all my checks and all my tips and all my money, and after five years, I start, start fighting and all of that, and I get my tips. Of course I was collecting that money and, taking trips to Greece with my kids, and then have an opportunity to buy my own clothes, my own, to pay for my own clothes without having the sales people laughing at me that I had no bone in my body to buy my, my own clothes. So anyway, yeah, after that, I was, yeah that's, yeah. I find now that, no matter how much money you could have, if you don't have relatives, you don't have anything <crying> {110}. <silence>. Anyway. Okay.

G: You wanna stop?

Kolias: No.

G: Were there any other immigrants in the United States that you were related to? Did anybody, any other relatives come?

Kolias: No. No, not my, my side. It was from my husband's side. He had some relatives down in Los Angeles. And in the beginning he was pretending he didn't know them, but then his cousin Eleni, she, she got determined to come and find us, and it's always very nice to have, to meet a relative, to have somebody. And, I had friendship with her for a lotta, lotta years, and then she moved to Greece, and that's gone.

I: So you don't talk to her anymore?

Kolias: I'm talking to her about a couple times a year.

I: Are there relatives, do your husband, does your husband have relatives in other states in the United States?

Kolias: He have first cousins, he have in Ohio. And he have one in New York, and two of them is in Los Angeles still, and he have lotta nephew and nieces. But he have no communication with them, with them.

I: Okay.

Kolias: When I came here he had another uncle, a brother of the uncle who brought him here. But, he did not talk to him, but I met him once, and then he died, 1962, so he was pretty old.

I: Where did he live?

Kolias: He lived, he was living downtown, in a hotel room.

I: In San Francisco?

Kolias: Yeah, in San Francisco.

I: I forgot to ask you, when you started working, what was your job?

Kolias: My job was as a waitress. And, course, work as a waitress, when you don't know how to write, it was one of the biggest things because you can speak some English, but if you don't know how to write the orders, it's very hard. But anyway, I work in the same place for 18 years. The first six months was very hard, but I met this really, really nice person, woman, who was my manager, and she taught me all about money and all about the job, and all about, and she stay friend with me for thirty-five years until she die.

I: What was her name?

Kolias: Her name is, was Em Lalac <check spelling {140}>. She died 90 years old.

I: When you think about your Greek heritage, what values did you want to pass on to your children?

Kolias: <crying> Oh, I, I want to pass on to my kids, more than anything else, the life and the tightness I will have between ourselves, all of us, my family, but I wish my kids never, never to have my husband's side of the family, they don't have love, they don't have, hatred for each other, or, I don't know if it was my husband only or them, it was horrible, something I never ever met in my life, that not to care for each other, and other, other one, my kids, it was the worst enemy to have that kind of life {156}. I want my kids to be very, very tight and love to each other and love their own kids and be happy and be everything in this world. <silence>

I: What do you like about America?

Kolias: America is beautiful. It's really a beautiful country because they giving you all the opportunities to have a really rich life, even if you don't have everything, you still, you can make it to be, to be a very happy person. America, it's, I want since, I mean, I'm here most of my life, 47 years now. I don't regret that I'm here. I wish, my only wish is to have people here that I can be together, but, I mean I'm looking outside at see this beautiful San Francisco. I mean, who doesn't like San Francisco? Of course I haven't been other places than here. And I've been to Los Angeles also, but Los Angeles is very hot. Yeah, I love the United States. This is a country that you can make anything you need to make. You can make, be very wealthy, and you can be very poor, just depend how you do your life. That's opportunities we never had, in, back in Greece. That's for sure. But still to this day, I love this country, but I love where I came from.

I: What do you love about Greece?

Kolias: I love the people, I love where I born, I love everything about it. <crying>

I: Do you think that you might ever move back there?

Kolias: I don't think so. Because, I won't ever leave my kids for anything or anybody. I will not leave my grandson for anything in this world, I'll have to, I cannot stand to be away from my, my kids, my grandson. I have to be right here, so, if I ever go back there, it's gonna be only for short vacation, not to live there {185}. Because, living there after 47 years, you don't know the, the way of living <sounds very teary now>, you don't know, it's lotta things. We have to start learning from the beginning. And for me, I don't think I want to go through all of that. And then, my life is here. My kids, my grandson is here, my scholar is right here, my husband is here. Nobody can replace my kids for anything in this world. Nothing for my life, that's for sure.

I: When you go back to Greece, does it seem different to you? Does the culture seem like it changed while you were gone?

Kolias: Yeah. It's very hard to, so different. It's very hard to get along or get, not along, to get used to things. You looking people, it's not just like when I left people. They are normal, they're nice, they're looking us little bit down because we are Americans, and I don't know why they have that, you know. Not our own people, not the relatives, but people from Greece, when we they hear America, they always think, "Oh, well, those dummy Americans." So, well, that's how it felt. It's, when I go there, I stay two months, two and a half months and then I want so bad to come back. I don't want to go to stay there more than three months, getting very, very tiring because, you know, you getting very tired to have somebody always to go with you somewhere around. If you have the money, how will you gonna go about, that may be because, all of this, because I'm not very, familiar with a lot of places because I don't go any place here. So, when I go there I have hard time, yes.

I: When you go back there do you find that the Greek language has changed?

Kolias: <Coughs>. Yes. The Greek language have changed a lot. Of course for the better. Lotta words <coughs>, lotta words I didn't know before and they are still to this day, sometimes

they talk to me on the phone and I don't understand some words and I have to ask to learn them.

I: What kind of words are they?

Kolias: Oh, they, I was asking the other day what the affection in English, I mean in Greek, and they were saying something I don't even remember. So it's lotta like, they mix up English and Greek now. And then the names, the American names and other names, and lotta things that have been change, of course for the better. It's beautiful, the way I see some, some programs on, the Greek, the Greek T.V. and they look— I'm wondering if it was made in Greece or in the United States, so. They have lotta beautiful things.

I: So you listen to, or you watch Greek T.V.? Do you, do you, how do you keep in touch with Greek culture in America?

Kolias: Well, I watch the Greek T.V. every Saturday, and my family, they send me some DVDs from there, and I watch lotta that. And they send me some DVDs from my nieces and grandkids and all of that, so I can see and when I go there, I can see the big difference. It's for the better, not for the worse, so yeah.

I: When you left, Greece, were most of the people that you knew pretty poor?

Kolias: Yes. Very poor.

I: And//

Kolias: //We talking about the fifties and sixties now, and before that, people that were very, very poor, life, it was so much different. Day and night, you cannot compare today Greece with that Greece I came from. Now Greece is so better, everybody, even the poor people, they have better lives. So it's so much different, so better. But still it's not for us who got, where here so many, many years to back, go back there and start all over again. It's too late for us. It's better, a person not to leave their own country. And I don't wish my daughters to go and live in

Greece because this is their country. This is their lives and if they want to go, they can go for vacations but, to stay there, they always gonna have a hard time, just like I had, I had a hard time when I came here. With the languages, with the way people they thinking, the way people they'll, they thinking things, it's so—here it's easier to get used to this American life than to go to Greece and start, try to learn the Greek way. It is lot of manipulation, a lotta sneaking, lotta different ways, lotta things, so I'm, I'm not condemning my country, but you have to be very, very alert, no matter where you are. People, they can get advantage of the other human being, even to this day. <silence>

I: When you were a little girl did you go to school?

Kolias: When I was a young girl, I went to school until, until six grade. And, but I was not a good student in lotta ways. In some ways. I good, I was good in math and geography, and I didn't like history. I was good in sciences, science, and I was, was good, writing poems and all of that. And those years I had a, a teacher who if you were given, my father, he had some sheeps, Roberta, and if my father he was not fixing for him the, the brand new little lamb for Easter, he was giving us bad grades. <Interviewer makes a sound> If my father was giving them goat cheese and all of that, they were putting us to go the next grade. So, it was lot of that going on. But I was very, very happy. A young woman, as long, until I came, until I marry my husband. And I don't, it's this country make me happy. It was this country that can make anybody happy, as long you want to work and study and say to yourself, I will make everything possible here. A lotta Greeks, they did. Lotta Greeks, they did. They brought their own families, they make money, they make business, they are in the politics, they are, I mean, very, very smart people, to, some happens different ways.

I: So you knew a lot of people that were successful, that immigrated here?

Kolias: Oh, in the United States? Ye-yes, in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and when you come here, they have, the Greeks, the

Greek hour, I mean on T.V. Channel nine they have the Greek Americans. They have successful, lotta, lotta names and, even today they have lotta names in everywhere, I mean as congressmen, and journalists, and actors, there's an actress, and lotta, lotta Greek people, they are very successful in this country. Just like they are back in their own country.

I: If you could have picked any profession, which one would you have picked?

Kolias: Myself? I don't know, I mean, those years, when I had an opportunity, I can be anybody, I can, I was not good, I was very good in math. I could be accountant. I can be computer or something. But now <chuckles> I can't be nobody.

I: Wow.

Kolias: But now I cannot learn anything. I forget everything.

I: Now you're yiayia.

Kolias: Yeah. Yeah. I'm very lucky. I'm very yiayia. <Interviewer laughs> And I love it. I'm very, very lucky on that. And that, thank you Georgia for giving me my little grandson. When I call, he say YIA YIA. He screaming and dancing and all of that.

I: I think our time is just about up. Thank you very much//

Kolias: //You're welcome.

I: // for sharing your life.

Kolias: <Takes a breath> Okay, thank you too. **END OF SIDE B/ END OF TAPE** {319}